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ABSTRACT

The possibility that child behavior could affect parental choice of socialization technique was examined. Girls, age nine, (N=3) were trained to act high and low in person-orientation, and served as confederates. Female college students (N-24), who were unaware that the children were trained, each participated in one session. Results demonstrated that experimentally induced variations did affect adult socialization techniques in a situation involving moral behavior, and that child effects cannot be dismissed as minor influences in the interactive system of adult and child. (Author/KA)

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THE INFLUENCE OF CHILD PERSON-ORIENTATION ON ADULT METHOD OF ELICITING MORAL BEHAVIOR

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The social development of children is increasingly being viewed as emerging out of a circular process in which children and adults influence each other (e.g. Bell, 1968; Bell, 1971; Bell and Harper, 1977). Specific investigations into children's influences on adults' socialization techniques have been slow to develop, however, and this lag particularly characterizes the area of moral development. One reason for the lag is that the primary hypothesis motivating research has been unidirectional. Over the last ten years, Martin Hoffman (e.g. Hoffman and Saltzstein, 1967; Hoffman, 1970, 1975) has interpreted the negative correlations he found between parental power-assertion and a child's internal moral orientation and the positive relations found between parental induction and a child's internal moral orientation as primarily indicating the action of the parent on the child (e.g. Hoffman, 1975). The implication of this is that the parent's selection of discipline method is not greatly affected by the child. Although Hoffman, of course, admits that children do affect adults, he believes that these effects are very small and not important relative to the more powerful effects of parents and other adults on children (Hoffman, 1975). Hoffman's conclusions have been largely based on correlational data from naturalistic studies of children's behavior and on parental reports at a single point in time. Because of the type of data collection used, a clear delineation of the direction of effects can not be made.

Bell (Ch. 4 in Bell and Harper, 1977) has suggested that the parent's selection of child rearing techniques in moral development could be a response to characteristics of the child such as

person-orientation. He hypothesized that highly person-oriented children attend to behavior of their parents and thus may reinforce social responses emanating from them.

Most previous studies concerned with the effects of children's characteristics on adults' disciplinary methods have dealt with physical attractiveness (Dion, 1974), demographic variables such as age (Clifford, 1959), sex (Dion, 1972; Rothbart and Maccoby, 1966) and race of the child (Coates, 1972). However, there is some evidence from studies using videotaped simulations of child-adult interactions that a child's behavioral characteristics also affect an adult's disciplinary approach. Stevens-Long (1973) found that children with very high activity levels elicited more punitiveness from adults. Sawin, Parke, Harrison and Kreling (1975) found that a child's response (such as defiance or pleading) to initial adult discipline altered the adult's punitiveness. A few investigators have explored child effects on adults using child confederates although they did not explore this effect in a disciplinary context. Cantor and colleagues (Cantor and Gelfand, 1977; Cantor, Wood, and Gelfand, in press) trained 12 elementary school children to be responsive in one condition and unresponsive in another. The responsive children elicited more attention and helping behavior from adults during several play sessions than socially withdrawn children. Bates (1976) trained four 11-year old boys to vary their positive behavior (observing an adult's face 75% of the time and smiling) while being taught mathematics. Children received more positive expressions, positive voice tone, and a higher rate of words spoken, and had their social abilities rated more highly than children who were less positive. The

purpose of the present study was to test the hypothesized child effects in the area of moral development with a research approach that permits conclusions relative to direction of effects.

Participants

Three nine-year-old girls who were trained to act high and low in person-orientation served as confederates. Each participated in eight sessions -- half under the high and half under the low condition. Twenty-four female college students who were unaware that the children were trained each participated in one session.

Procedure

At the start of each session the adult was given brief instructions and seated in front of a one-way mirror so she could observe the child with whom she would soon be working. A two-minute conversation between the child and an experimenter was then staged in front of the adult in order to increase the impact of the child's high or low person-orientation, when the actual interaction began.

Prior to each period the adults were given ten colored poker chips and told that if they so desired they could give the child some of these chips or take away some the child already had. Adults were also told that the child could exchange these chips for toys or books after the 20-minute session. The purpose of this was to simulate the material reward that parents and other adults have and can use in a disciplinary context.

Following this, the adult was reminded that she should try to get the child to show consideration for others in each of the four periods. Although the four periods differed in the actual

materials used, in all of them the adult was to encourage the child to do something for another child (such as sew a pillow for a handicapped child). In the high condition the children were trained to attend to the adult's face and answer promptly. In the low condition the children were trained to focus their eyes on the materials (Lincoln logs, beads, sewing material, or small toys) and to count to five subvocally before answering the adult. The child's actual performance on the altruistic tasks remained constant throughout both conditions.

Results and Discussion

Two Multivariate Analyses of Variance on the behaviors that the children were supposed to manipulate revealed that in both the 2-minute staged conversation ($F= 134.602$, $df= 1,22$, $p<.001$) and the 20 minutes of adult-child interaction that followed ($F= 25.225$, $df= 1,22$, $p<.001$), the children in the high person-orientation condition observed the adult's face more and responded more quickly to the adult's questions and comments. According to their responses on a questionaire they completed after the 20-minute interaction, the adults perceived these differences. Children in the high group were rated as more attentive to the adult ($F= 7.606$, $df= 1,22$, $p<.011$) and more responsive to questions ($F= 6.769$, $df= 1,22$, $p<.016$) than children in the low condition. Thus, the intended manipulation of person-orientation did occur and was noticed by the adults.

Some child behaviors were to be similar in both conditions. Cooperation was one such behavior. On the post-session questionaire, adults rated children in both the high and low conditions similarly on how frustrating it was for the adult to work with them and on

how helpless the adults felt in dealing with the children, so it is likely that children in one group were not more cooperative than those in the other. Also, because children in both conditions were rated as showing a great deal of interest in the toys and crafts, it is most likely that the child's failures to follow the adult's altruistic urgings were seen as due to the child's interest in the toys and crafts and not just stubbornness.

To evaluate how adults acted when working with children high or low in person-orientation, a ratio score was used. Pretesting revealed rather large differences in the amount that various adults talked in this situation so merely comparing frequencies of various verbal categories would result in huge within group variability. The ratio used was a power assertion measure divided by an induction measure plus the power assertion measure. The induction measure is algebraically the same as the one used by Hoffman to evaluate "other-oriented induction" (Hoffman and Saltzstein, 1967). The induction score consists of two times the number of "references to another child's feelings" plus "the number of references to consequences for another child that are not explicitly to feelings." Because Hoffman's power assertion scoring method could not be adapted easily to the present study, a new one was developed. The new power assertion measure is "two times the number of token-oriented statements" plus "the number of commands given the child." Just as the references to feelings were apparently considered by Hoffman to be stronger indications of induction, it was thought that the discussions of tokens (colored chips) were stronger evidence of power assertive

behavior than commands were, especially since so many of the commands coded were mild in nature compared to less frequent but more coercive use of tokens.

Because the distribution of the adults' ratio scores was not normal for the high person-oriented condition, a nonparametric test was used to detect differences. Adults in the low person-orientation condition had significantly (White test, $p<.01$) higher ratio scores ($\bar{X}=.56$, SD=.15) than adults in the low person-orientation condition ($\bar{X}=.25$, SD=.27). This means that relatively more power-assertive statements were made by adults interacting with a child in the low condition than by adults interacting with a child in the high condition. In other words, children in the low condition received many commands and material bargaining statements (56%) in addition to induction (44%). The children in the high condition received mostly (75%) "other-oriented inductive" types of statements such as "how would the other child feel if she came back and the tower was broken?"

These results demonstrate that child effects cannot be dismissed as minor influences in the interactive system of adult and child. Specifically the differences found indicate an important way in which children contribute to their own socialization. The purpose of the study was to test the logical possibility that child behavior could affect parent choice of socialization technique. This now must be considered more than a logical possibility. As predicted, experimentally-produced variations did affect adult socialization techniques in a situation involving moral behavior. This finding also means that it is a now more likely possibility that the correlations found in field

studies between child moral behavior and parent discipline technique could have evolved in part out of the effects of children on parents.

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